

Under the auspices of  
The Blavatsky Lodge, Theosophical Society  
Sydney

# *The Spiritual Factor in National Life*

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A LECTURE by  
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DELIVERED ON MAY 4th, 1924

PRICE - 4<sup>d</sup>.

Theosophical Publishing House  
Cathcart House  
11c Castlereagh Street  
Sydney



OAKLAND  
Theosophical Book Concern  
2 TO 4 P. M. WEEK DAYS  
SUNDAYS 8 TO 9 P. M.  
PACIFIC BUILDING  
16TH AND JEFFERSON STS.

*Spiritual Factor*

No. \_\_\_\_\_ Sc \_\_\_\_\_

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## The Spiritual Factor in National Life

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THERE are two things in which we heartily believe to-day. One is spirituality and the other is nationalism. But these two essentials of modern life stand in most ways contrasted one to the other. We have not yet quite managed to live a life of righteousness before God and yet at the same time one of harmlessness to man. Our own Imperial poet, Kipling, has well summed up this contrast between profession and action.

Peace on earth and Goodwill to men—  
So greet we Christmas Day,  
Oh, Christian, take your gun and then,  
Oh, Christian, out and slay.

That is modern civilization with its two contrasted elements, the ideal which we preach and our practical application of it. We have not yet decided whether to make a success of life as the best equipped and most destructive of the animals, or as the least capable of idealists. On the whole, we take as an axiom in life that men will succeed best, like the animals, by subscribing to the doctrine of the survival of the fittest. All our economic organization is based upon that principle, and therefore we admire the strong man. We put up statues to builders of Empires, and we ignore the loss of life and the cruelties which Empire building brings in its train. We always consider strength the supreme factor, for it brings wealth and position, and we admire strength in the individual and the nation. But having accepted the doctrine of the animal, we are not consistent. We ought in theory to destroy all that is useless and weak.

But we protect cripples; we allow the blind to exist; we ought to get rid of all our old people as inefficient in life. As animals, we are extremely sentimental. On the other hand, as religious people, as those who profess a real ideal, we are certainly not consistent, because the moment you present the ideals of the Christ to any business man he says, "That is all very well; but business is business." Everywhere this difficulty confronts us. Let me read you a quotation which exemplifies what is happening constantly. George Macdonald thus describes a type of individual which is not rare:

It is much easier to persuade man that God cares for certain observances, than that He cares for simple honesty and truth and gentleness and loving kindness. The man who would shudder at the idea of a rough word of the description commonly called swearing, will not even have a twinge of conscience after a whole morning of ill-tempered sullenness, capricious scolding, villainously unfair animadversion, or surly cross-grained treatment generally of wife and children! Such a man will omit neither family worship nor a sneer at his neighbour. He will neither milk his cow on the first day of the week without a Sabbath mask on his face, nor move it while he waters the milk for his customers. Yet he may not be an absolute hypocrite. What can be done for him, however, hell itself may have to determine.

All our modern life is that, and that is the reason why it is so supremely difficult for anyone, who has a spiritual ideal to offer, to present it with any likelihood of its full acceptance. He does not know how to regard his hearers, whether to regard them as frankly accepting the gospel of the brute, or as frankly accepting the gospel of Christ. Let me read you another quotation, one from Ruskin, who met this difficulty all the time:

For if you address any average modern English company as believing in an eternal life, and endeavour to draw any conclusions from this assumed belief as to their present business, they will forthwith tell you that what you say is very beautiful, but it is not practical. If, on the contrary, you frankly address them as unbelievers in an eternal life, and try to draw any consequences from that unbelief, they immediately hold you for an accursed person, and shake off the dust from their feet at you. And the more I thought over what I had got to say, the less I found I could say it, without some reference to this intangible or intractable part of the subject. It made all the difference, in asserting any principle of war, whether one assumed that a discharge of artillery would merely knead down a certain quantity of clay into a level line, as in a brick-field; or whether, out of every separately Christian-named portion of the ruinous heap, there went out, into the smoke and dead-fallen air of battle, some astonished condition of soul, unwillingly released. It made all the difference in speaking of the possible range of commerce, whether one assumed that all bargains related only to visible property—or whether property, for the present invisible, but nevertheless real, was elsewhere purchaseable on other terms.

Now that is frankly the problem of modern civilization, and it is therefore necessary to have some fundamental ideas as to what constitutes real civilization. We are all the time trying to put our national houses in order, but we have not yet recognized what are the principles of true reconstruction. We think that the Nationalist party or the Liberal party or the Conservative party or the Labour party may have some kind of cure. We are always looking for remedies from various political parties, but it has not yet dawned upon anyone that there is a God's party, and that God may have a platform for humanity just as any political party.

My aim is to show you that God has a party, that He too has a platform for the bringing of the Golden Age. But before we can understand the spiritual factor in life, we have first and foremost to reconstruct our idea about God. For as you think of God, so is your conduct to man. If you think of God as a tyrant, as a God of vengeance, you in return will be tyrannical and revengeful towards your weaker neighbour. If you think of God as a quiescent God in heaven, looking over heaven's bannisters to see how the world is getting on, you too will look over the bannisters of your house to see how the other people are arranging the world. The trouble with Christian civilization is that the God of orthodoxy is a static God. The reconstruction of life will only begin when we realize that God is a dynamic God, supremely God the Worker, not the God who is doing nothing except surveying the world spread out before Him.

We have to start with the conception that this universe is not perfect, and that God does not intend it to be perfect now. He certainly is omnipotent, but if He wanted this universe to be absolutely perfect now in all its details, He would have created it so. If then there is imperfection, there must be a reason, and the reason is that out of imperfection He is going to bring perfection. And how? He has sent us into the universe, and we are here to work so as to reveal His omnipotence. Until you and I can reveal God's omnipotence, God is not omnipotent, and the universe will still be filled with evil. But as you and I and each individual realize that there is something divine within us, and as we also understand that God is the Worker, then there is the possibility of bringing heaven here upon earth.

Let us think of God not as one who made a mechanism of the universe which He wound up to go towards its end, but rather as a great Scientist, a great Organiser, a great Experimenter who has begun a scheme which He knows is not perfect, wherein He constantly meets with

obstacles and difficulties, but for which He has a plan of perfection, and so all the time is seeking helpers, and all the time desires anxiously that thousands upon thousands should come and work with Him so that His ideal plan may become realized. From such a conception of God as a dynamic God, and from the need that He has in His scheme of each one of us, there follows logically that your life and my life here is not an examination room to test whether we shall be fit after we die to go to heaven or hell, but rather a laboratory where we are to reveal by work our divinity. Each one of us is born into life to so reconstruct our mental, moral and ethical nature that in all our thoughts, feelings and actions we shall be mirrors of divine perfection. Each of us is born for that purpose, and since, as we are born, we are placed in nations and races, it is not such a far-off supposition that each nation has a work to do in the world to reveal divinity. Therefore a nation is not a mere aggregation of people coming together to protect themselves against aggression, and to survive as long as they can in a struggle for existence, but rather a body of potential workers grouped together in order that through them the nature of God may reveal itself. Just as a prism of glass will break up the blinding white light of the sun till we have the prismatic colours, just as all their shades are reflected on all sides of us, so are the many nations of the world. Think of God as a Splendour which no man can gaze upon lest he become blinded; then God's splendour of perfection is partially revealed in nation after nation, in civilization after civilization. By seeing the way in which mankind reveals the hidden Divinity, we gain some idea of God.

How is each individual, as each nation, to reveal the divine within him? The method is mutual service. It is not by kneeling and praying, not by going to some particular place like a church where we think we are nearer to God, but by our recognition that God's plan for all of us is to help each other by mutual service, that the perfection which He desires for mankind will come. It will come not by the appearance of great Saviours who will perform a miracle and make heaven upon earth, but by each one of us understanding in what way we can perform that miracle by a united joint effort.

We are born, then, to take part in the great plan of God, to bring every ideal which He has to realization, and the method of work is mutual service. And if you take that as the axiom, that God sends us into life to understand His plan and to co-operate with Him, then you will see the reason for all the various occupations of men and for the varieties of their race, religion and type

in the world. Humanity is divided into men and women, that is, into two types of consciousness, of feeling, thinking and doing. Why are there these two types? If God wants only some kind of sexless angel, why did He not make us so? If there are men and women, it is because these two types of thought and feeling are required in order to bring about the perfection of God's plan. There is family life, with fathers, mothers and children. Why these relations between men? Obviously because by those relations something of the divine plan is realized. The father is necessary, the mother is necessary, because through the birth and rearing of the children the divine plan can be a little more realized; children are necessary, and their duty towards their elders is essential, because through filial actions the plan of God comes to fulfilment. As civilization develops, we find on all sides of us occupation after occupation; men and women specialize in various forms of activity, because each specialist enables a release of the cultural power in a people. Once upon a time when men were savages, all the males were fighters. After a time only a few males were called upon to take up the work of defence, and the rest instead of going out and fighting, helped the tribe in other ways. Some began to cultivate the ground, others to construct, weave, teach or heal. One by one through specialization civilization developed.

If our first axiom is true that God is a Worker, that He is directing all things, then obviously there can be nothing of chance in life. As mankind develops one type of organization after another, they all come as part of a divine plan. There are many types of workers in a nation, but the majority are the manual workers. After them come the distributors of resources, the merchants; then come the administrators, the legislators and the men in the various Government departments who must see to the smooth working of the machinery of government. We have too the healers, the teachers, and the priests. Function after function slowly develops, and we find that they are all necessary. As we look at these functions, these professions and occupations, we find that all men and women are not capable of working in all of them. Some men are far better at manual labour than at buying and selling; some have an aptitude for administration which they do not have for teaching. We find there are inequalities of capacity and of character.

Now we must face the fact that these inequalities are necessary in life. It is beautiful to preach the equality of man. But there is no such thing as equality in life, except the equality of our own divine origin and of



its ultimate realization. But as men and women manifested here on earth, who have a work in life to do, we are distinctly unequal in faculty. One reason for the inequality is that, at any given moment in life, all mankind as souls are not of the same age. There are old souls and there are young souls, and the old souls are those who are able to grasp life in a larger way, and especially those who are capable of greater sacrifice. It is that quality of sacrifice in a man or a woman which gives you the indication whether he or she is a mature soul, or only a child soul just come forth from God who is beginning to experiment with life for the first time.

While, then, inequality is a fact, yet everyone of us is needed in the scheme. Even if what we bring as a contribution is small, because our capacity is small, yet there need be no inequality in the spirit with which we offer. So far as the great divine scheme is concerned, the offering of a child has as necessary a work to do as the offering of a genius. In an intricate mechanism a tiny wheel is just as necessary as a great driving wheel. It is not the size of the offering which matters, but the spirit of the offering. Therefore when we look round at the world and see genius at one end of the human ladder, and simple-minded men and women restricted by their limitations and capable of little at the other end, we know that both are necessary in the divine scheme, because, however low and humble a child soul may be, he too is also capable of the finest spirit of offering. This is the ancient truth which is taught us by George Herbert:

All may of Thee partake,  
Nothing can be so mean,  
Which with this tincture "For Thy sake,"  
Will not grow bright and clean;  
A servant with this clause  
Makes drudgery divine,  
Who sweeps a room as for Thy laws  
Makes that and the action fine.

And so we have the great principle that all men are needed in the plan of God with their offerings of mutual service.

Let us now turn to consider national life. There are just a few leading ideas which are not now recognized but which need very clear recognition, and one of them is this, that an unseen injury is more potent than a seen injury, both in individual life and in national life. We punish the doer of an injury which we can see, but we do not take into account the injury which is done by thought because we do not see it. We let the business man, who plans all kinds of unscrupulous things but does not break the law, go free, and we honour



him for the wealth he acquires, but we hang the weak-minded man who is not able to control himself and who in a fit of anger kills another. But we have to realize as fundamental in national life that an injury which is planned, though not accomplished, is as powerful an injury as that done visibly. And this has to be applied to national life.

Our biggest failure in civilization is this, that we accept the teachings of our religious Founders for the individual but not for the nation. But God is not mocked, and that which we sow we reap. Let me take two instances to show you how nations sow and reap. Take first a little nation like Switzerland, that has an army defence only and is bound never to send it outside Switzerland. This little people, made up of three races, German, French and Italian, have a united life; they took an opportunity which came to them many years ago, for they organized all the work in the world to-day which we call the Red Cross. It was Switzerland which took the lead in that healing work for the world. Years pass, and that bread cast upon the waters comes back to Switzerland, and the land of that little people becomes the home of the League of Nations. All men's thoughts will become more and more directed to Switzerland, for that land is becoming the centre of a world organization. On the other side let us take our British Empire, which a century ago did a magnificent thing. It abolished slavery, not by defrauding the owners of the value of the slaves, as was done in America and Russia, but by frank recognition that slavery was inconsistent with British institutions. At the same time no one was made to suffer because an old institution was going to be abolished, and so over twenty millions were voted by the British people to re-imburse the slave owners in the British Colonies. A good thing was done in the right way, and as the result of that, the bread cast upon the waters came back in opportunity after opportunity for colonial expansion, for planting the ideals of Empire. But if you could read the unwritten history of expansion of the British Empire, how people after people who lived in the lands where God had placed them were wiped out or had their lands taken from them as the Empire expanded, if you could know all the cruelties which were done by the early settlers in the name of planting of the flag, then you would understand how that bread cast upon the waters comes back in the conditions of such a city as London, the centre of the Empire, the capital of the richest nation in the world, where there is scarcely a street but within a quarter of a mile of it, you can find a slum, where as

you go along streets full of luxury and splendour, you find men and women in the gutter begging to buy a loaf of bread. The heart of the Empire is the richest nation in the world, and yet about one-tenth of that nation is verging on starvation all the time. For good done by England, the return is opportunity of Empire; for evil done, the return is misery and degradation at the very heart of Empire. As is the bread cast upon the waters, so is the bread which the divine tide returns.

So then the first thing which we must realize is this, that whatever is done by the individual or by the nation, brings its effect for good or evil, and that every injury done to a fellow-man or to a nation, whether in the name of individual or national necessity, brings in its train an evil Karma. From that it is obvious that the injury of one is the injury of all. We have not realized that principle, though Christ taught it to us two thousand years ago. Look at the business in each city. All business men have liberty "within the law" to exploit the weaknesses of their fellow citizens. It is a question of "each for himself and the devil take the hindmost." That is the perfectly frank gospel of our institutions. We have not at all realized that all men are a chain, and that to permit at one end of the chain the rich man and woman glorying in a luxurious life and at the other end the poor man and woman toiling and slaving as a drudge is to injure every link in the chain in between. The exploitation of any single human being in the nation is the injury of the whole nation. We are apt to think that if we have millions in our national budgets, then the nation is thriving. No one inquires, at the same time when ministers bring forward budgets, how many men and women have lost golden opportunities in life during the year because none were given to them of self-expansion. We think nothing of that phase of life, for we only see one part. But the great principle is that the good which I do does not bring happiness to myself only, but to all the myriads in the land, and that the evil which I plan or do does not return evil to me alone but to all my fellow-men. Everyone of us helps or hinders the race of which he is a part.

There comes from this another great principle which is just dawning on the consciousness of nations. It is that, in doing a good piece of work, it is better to do it with another, even if slowly, than alone by oneself and swiftly. We are too individual; we do not like to mingle with people except now and then. Business men are suspicious of what is called collectivism or communism. They bring all kinds of arguments against men working together because they hold the individual's freedom is

handicapped. But the individual's freedom must be limited, seeing that he is only one link in a chain. We cannot allow one link to be rusty without running the risk of the neighbouring links of the chain becoming rusty also, and so spreading rust throughout the chain. Therefore there is a great spiritual principle which we have all to learn and of which some of us idealists must become examples to others; the principle is that it is better always to find others with whom to work than to work by ourselves. Remember what Christ said, "Where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them." If in the name of God or Christ you will work with another, if in the name of Humanity you will work with others, in the home, in business, it does not matter where is the place or what is the work, you will do more for civilization than you know.

All these ideals are especially needed to-day, because the World Spirit is attempting something magnificent now, and that is to bring the whole world to a realization of a collective life. The nations must step out of the darkness of individualism and work together as one World, as one Federation of peoples, no longer fighting each other as units with no common interests as human beings, but as the children of one God, as the embodiments of one glorious Humanity. One step towards this federation of the world is the federation of peoples called the British Empire. Whether we shall make a success of that Empire or not, God only knows, because if there is one thing certain it is this, that the British Empire is not British, for four-fifths of it are the coloured peoples. But the one-fifth has not realized that fact, and yet upon their realization, and upon fair and just dealing from the minority which holds the power to the majority which is powerless will rest the success of that institution.

But side by side with that institution, which can be a tremendous power for good if we make a success of it, is the League of Nations. This is the new attempt by the World Spirit to prevent wastage of every kind—wastage of force and material in building armies and navies, wastage of economic force in competition and exploitation, wastage of brains in the way in which each nation works selfishly upon its own lines, instead of trusting other nations with its discoveries. An attempt is being made to bring the whole world together on a common foundation of humanity.

Now, in this splendid attempt by the divine plan to federate the world, each of us is needed. There is a very striking truth which has in it a profound inspiration, and it is that a man is invincible when he knows he can never work alone. It is the man who says "God and I" who

makes a success of life, though that belief can also make him the greatest charlatan. The latter was the case with the German Emperor with his "I and God." Yet he attempted a fine thing, which none of us can attempt until we have the daring to presume that God needs us in His plan. So many of us are content to go on as weaklings, to remain as pawns in a game which someone else plays. But God is in very truth with us if you and I find out what is our role in the city, in the nation, in humanity, what is that particular piece of work which is waiting for us in the divine plan. Every one of us is needed in the plan; not the least equipped man or woman but has something to give which is necessary for the success of the great plan.

How are we to find our role, for on the finding of what is our part in the plan depends the true realization of life for each of us? Shall we find it in church? Perhaps. Shall we find it in a lecture hall? Perhaps. There are many ways of finding. But each must find for himself. Do not accept the work given to you by another, except during the time you are looking for your own; always seek till you find. I can suggest some ways, which perhaps will be useful for some of you, to find out what is that particular thing which is nearest to your hand, which you can do, which is necessary in the great plan. Go from the haunts of men and let the breezes blow round you, let the influences of the air and the sea and the earth and all the little whisperings of the leaves speak to you, and quietly watch and listen if you do not get a suggestion from within you of what is the next thing you can do. Remember, you must not ask for something magnificent to be done next year or ten years hence, when you will be a great genius, but ask what is the next thing which you can do as your contribution to the great work. It may be something to be done in the home, something to be done in the office, in your relation with your fellow-men. Or go and watch children playing, look at them, open your heart to them, enjoy their play, even though you do not take a part in it. And then see if there does not come some suggestion, once again of what you can do just where you are, for the divine plan. Or go and help someone who is suffering. Relieve his pain and his misery, with a word, with a deed, and after you have done that, then see if the great plan of God does not point out to you something else to do.

Each of you can find your part in the great plan. You are all seeking peace, but seek peace in action. Do not imagine that the spirit of God will only speak when you are in your closet kneeling and praying. His voice will speak in the thunderstorm, it will speak to you in

the roar of traffic of a great city. But in order that His voice may speak to you, you must change your spirit of life from asking things of life into a spirit of doing without. All our evils and sufferings come because we are eternally asking, always wanting things of life. When we train ourselves to be content with the few things which we have, then we shall be at peace. For the message of God is always near and easily audible. Do you want health? Forget all about your ill health, and send a kindly thought to another who is miserable or on a bed of pain, and then in place of those longings for health you will soon find peace in action. It is by finding that inner world that you will bring the realization of heaven upon earth, for yourself as for all mankind.

Each nation can be made the mirror of divine thought and feeling. You and I, if we live rightly, can so change this city that God will be realized by men, not only in church but also in the home, in the ferry, in the tram, in the office. There will be no place where some man or woman may not suddenly come to the realization of the splendour of life which is pouring out of the Divine upon your heart and mine. These things are possible if you and I begin the work. But the trouble with life is that we wait for someone else to begin. We say, "What can I do? I am limited; I have not much faculty; I have not much influence, I cannot do such and such things. Let people who have the power begin." But that is the mistake we make. If you and I will begin, just where we are with our limited faculties, with the few capacities which we have, then we shall make a centre of divine force, and as slowly that centre becomes stronger, it will call out other centres into being. Out of the mouths of babes comes wisdom, said the Christ; so out of the hearts of men and women of little faculty but of great aspiration will come the great centres of inspiration for the whole world.

This is national life, where each individual recognises that he must become the centre of divine radiance, so that God's will is mirrored in all the activities of men, in the city, in the nation. There is a spiritual factor in life, which is to bring God into all the things of life, into the home, into our play, into our politics and business. He is waiting to associate His wisdom, His strength and His beauty with all our occupations, at all times and in all places. If only men could understand how within Him all live and move and have their being, how He knows every tragedy and feels with it, how He plays with each child and delights in the child, how He looks into men's hearts and blesses the glory there, their ideal, and how He tenderly nurses all their weaknesses till they be-

come strong, then they would learn to greet Him in the street, in the home, in the office, on the ferry, in the train. All of us so greeting Him can make the perfect nation where God is in all, where God is known by all, where there is nothing else but God manifesting in heaven and on earth, God manifesting in man, God manifesting in the sky. Such a national realization is possible, if you and I will understand what we are and will do our part, without waiting for another to lead the way.







# Theosophical Society

President: DR. ANNIE BESANT

## OBJECTS.

1. To form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour.
2. To encourage the study of comparative religion, philosophy and science.
3. To investigate the unexplained laws of nature and the powers latent in man.

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